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## MOUNTAIN LION CAPTURES IN THE JEMEZ MOUNTAINS!

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A day at the office for a wildlife biologist is filled with fresh air sunshine and sometimes mountain lions. Recently we had the chance to capture two big cats in the Jemez Mountains. As part of the on-going Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) the Valles Caldera Trust and New Mexico State University (NMSU) are collaborating on large mammal monitoring. One of the goals for this program is to capture and monitor the movements of seven mountain lions. Over the last two years, however, we have only managed to capture two female mountain lions, due mostly to the lack of snow from which we could easily track these cats.



*Left: First mountain lion captured was a 10+ yr old female  
Right: Second mountain lion captured, 4-5 yr old female.*

The first female was unusually old and died from starvation which is common in elderly mountain lions. The collar placed on the second female malfunctioned so we can no longer track her movement. After a dry spell of a few months, and quite a bit of frustration with technology, we managed to capture two adult males within a two week span.

On July 29, of this year Dr. Brian Jansen captured and radio-collared a 5-6 year old male weighing 134 lbs. Jansen is a contractor with NMSU and professional mountain lion researcher. This capture was directly related to the capture of the second cat.

A week later we radio-tracked the first male to a suspected kill site. As we were hiking in to the site a mountain lion jumped out of a thicket about 100ft ahead of us and slowly moved away. We immediately saw this was a second, un-collared mountain lion that was also at the kill site. It was an incredible stroke of luck to find a second cat at the site. We placed a motion activated camera nearby with the hope that the un-collared cat would return that night. We made plans to return early the next morning and try to catch the cat using dogs.



*Dr. Brian Jansen with chemically immobilized mountain lion.  
Photo by B. Jansen*



*Black bear at mountain kill site. Photo taken by motion camera installed by R. Passernig and M. Peyton*

mountain lion that found a comfortable bedsite among some rocks. When we arrived the cat had clambered up a tree to escape the dogs.

Unfortunately that night a bear also found the kill site and the mountain lion was nowhere to be found! Talk about a busy spot- 2 mountain lions, 1 bear, 3 researchers, and 7 eager hound dogs! The bear ruined our plans for a cat capture so we left the site believing we missed a golden opportunity. We walked about a mile after leaving the kill site when Brian identified fresh tracks. He quickly released the dogs. They immediately picked up the scent and raced to find the cat. After a few miles the dogs caught up to the





*Mountain lion peers down from a perch high above his captors* Photo by M. Peyton

Since the mountain lion was “treed” the only way to capture it was to tranquilize it and lower the cat down. Jansen “darted” the cat and we safely lowered it to the ground using a rope. Once the cat was safe and secure on the ground we worked quickly to gather information. We attached a GPS and VHF radio-collar and drew blood for disease analysis. Once all of the measurements and required photos were taken, we injected the mountain lion with a reversal drug to counteract the effects of the tranquilizer. We watched, and waited until he awoke and moved away safely.

The photos display some of the ways we measure and for what we measure. Teeth suffer wear and tear and are an excellent indicator of age. This cat was estimated to be 3-4 years old. Paw measurement of the heel pads will help researchers identify individuals in the field. Jansen and Ruth Passernig (lower right) take other measurements of the adult male who weighed in at 120 lbs.



Work with mountain lions will continue with locating and documenting future kill sites, monitoring movements in relationship to vegetation treatments and wildfires. We still hope to capture several more mountain lions, so please let us know if you see or hear of any in the southwest Jemez Mountains! Email [mpeyton@vallescaldera.gov](mailto:mpeyton@vallescaldera.gov) if you see one!